The goddess Hina-ʻai-a-ka-malama (Hina-feeding-on-the-moon) was frustrated. She loved her human ʻohana but her husband, the chief ʻAi-kanaka, was lazy, and their two sons, Puna-i-mua and Hema, were just like him. ʻAi-kanaka and his sons hardly ever helped with chores or contributed to the family’s survival. They never pounded kalo to make poi. They rarely filled the ipu wai with fresh water.

They depended on Hina-ʻai-a-ka-malama to maintain their hale and provide for their ʻohana. She pounded the softest and whitest kapa from the wauke plant for their clothing. She wove beautiful mats from the leaves of the hala tree for sitting and resting. She made torches from the nuts of the kukui tree to light their home. It took Hina-ʻai-a-ka-malama a long time to finish all this work. Then she still had to complete all the household chores since no one else did them. She was disappointed in her human family.

One day after Hina-ʻai-a-ka-malama spent much of the morning beating and weaving, she discovered that once again there was no food for their evening meal. No poi, no fish, nothing! The behavior of her ʻohana was getting worse and worse. The next morning as Hina-ʻai-a-ka-malama gazed towards the sun, she spotted a brightly colored rainbow arching across the sky. Hina-ʻai-a-ka-malama decided to climb it in search of a new home. “I will live on the sun!” she declared.

Hina-ʻai-a-ka-malama started to climb up the rainbow. She rose higher and higher into the sky, past the clouds. As she got closer to the sun, she became hotter and hotter. The heat made Hina-ʻai-a-ka-malama feel weak, so weak that she could barely continue to crawl up
the colorful path through the sky. “Aue! I feel like I’m on fire!” she cried. “I can’t stay on the sun.”

Hina-‘ai-ka-ka-malama slid down the rainbow to the clouds. She rested there until she regained her strength and could return back to the earth once more. As the sunset in the west behind the Ko‘olau mountains, she looked towards the east and noticed that the moon had risen. It was a full moon shining brightly in the night sky. The moon looked beautiful above Ma‘eli‘eli, a hill in the ahupua‘a of He‘eia. Hina-‘ai-a-ka-malama declared, “I will climb to the moon and find rest there. The moon will be my new home.”

Hina-‘ai-a-ka-malama fetched her special ipu named after her beloved brother Kipapa-lau-‘ulu. He gave her this ipu containing knowledge of the mahina and hoku. Hina-‘ai-a-ka-malama was always able to get food for her troublesome family, for Kipapa-lau-‘ulu showed her where and when certain foods would grow and be ready to harvest and gather.

Along with Kipapa-lau-‘ulu, she gathered her most valued possessions and tucked them under her arm. Hina-‘ai-a-ka-malama sprinted up Ma‘eli‘eli and leaped into the sky towards the moon.

‘Ai-kanaka saw what was happening and ran after her anxiously calling out to his wife. “Stay,” he pleaded, “do not leave your family to live in the sky!”

“I have made up my mind. I am leaving to live on the moon!” Hina-‘ai-a-ka-malama replied firmly. She continued to climb higher and higher into the night sky.

‘Ai-kanaka ran up Ma‘eli‘eli and with a mighty jump, he reached for her. Hina-‘ai-a-ka-malama nearly escaped, but’ Ai-kanaka managed to grab her foot.

Hina-‘ai-a-ka-malama chanted and chanted to her ‘ohana, her ‘aumākua, and to those who live in pō to help her escape. Finally, her prayers were answered. She pulled free from ‘Ai-kanaka, but her foot broke off. ‘Ai-kanaka, holding Hina-‘ai-a-ka-malama’s foot, tumbled and tumbled down the side of Ma‘eli‘eli and fell to the ground. Filled with great sadness, ‘Ai-kanaka buried Hina-‘ai-a-ka-malama’s foot in the ground at Ma‘eli‘eli. He then returned home to tell his sons of the tragedy.

In spite of her injury, Hina-‘ai-a-ka-malama was still determined to reach the moon and make it her new home. Holding Kipapa-lau-‘ulu in her arms, she slowly stumbled onto the moon. Hina-‘ai-a-ka-malama was finally free!

‘Ai-kanaka and his sons were brokenhearted by the suffering they caused Hina-‘ai-a-ka-malama. From her new home on the moon, she could hear ‘Ai-kanaka, Puna-i-mua and Hema as they cried, expressing their apologies with tears and chants.
Over time, Hina-'ai-a-ka-malama realized that her 'ohana felt truly sorry for the way they had mistreated her. With aloha and a generous, forgiving spirit, Hina-'ai-a-ka-malama gave her 'ohana a precious gift. From the place where her foot was buried, a vine started to grow. It was a new plant that we know today as 'uala, sweet potato.

Those who know this mo'olelo will often refer to 'uala as hua-lani, which means “seed of heaven.” From ancient days until today, 'uala is cultivated by breaking off and planting pieces of the mother plant.

Hina-'ai-a-ka-malama is often referred to as Lono-muku,” the crippled Lono.” This name shows her relationship to Lono the god of agriculture, peace, and rain. It also reflects Hina’s connection to growing food, and the sacrifices she made on her journey to the moon.

So, the next time you see the beauty of a full moon, look carefully into its silver light. Can you see Hina-'ai-a-ka-malama beating kapa with Kipapa-lau-'ulu at her side? Hawaiians are forever grateful for Hina-'ai-a-ka-malama’s gift from the heavens.

The mo 'olelo of Hina-'ai-a-ka-malama has been retold from generation to generation. The account in this reader is based primarily on interpretations found in Hawaiian Mythology by Martha Beckwith, Hina the Goddess by Dietrich Varez, Hawaiian language newspapers, and information collected by the Bishop Museum. This version is written by Papahana Kuaola staff.